DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 444 503 IR 020 159

AUTHOR Maxey, Dennis
TITLE Learning through Dignity: Participatory Communication Theory.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 6p.; In: Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference: Proceedings of SITE 2000 (11th, San Diego, California February 8-12, 2000). Volumes 1-3; see IR 020 112.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cognitive Processes; *Communication (Thought Transfer); *Instructional Design; Learning Theories; Models; *Participation; Self Efficacy
IDENTIFIERS Situated Learning

ABSTRACT

This paper describes an alternative approach to traditional instructional design models by suggesting that participatory communication theory (PCT) creates a process that values the learner's voice. As a student develops a critical awareness of his or her environment, participatory media becomes a catalyst for cognition. Learners use media tools to influence their own lives. PCT suggests that learning is political as well as psychological and that dignity is a fundamental component of learning. The paper first defines participatory communication and its theoretical constructs. Second, an explanation of how it works is given. Third, several examples of participatory communication projects are presented. Fourth, a rationale for employing PCT is suggested, a rationale anchored in self-efficacy research as well as socio-constructivist approaches to learning theory. Finally, the paper explores the uses and ramifications of PCT in an instructional design model. Contains 15 references. (MES)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 444 503

LEARNING THROUGH DIGNITY: PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION THEORY

Dennis Maxey
Instructional Technology Program
Bridgewater State College
United States
dmaxey@bridgew.edu

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

G.H. Marks

Abstract: This paper describes an alternative approach to traditional instructional design models by suggesting that participatory communication theory (PCT) creates a process which values the learner's voice. As a student develops a critical awareness of his/her environment, participatory media becomes a catalyst for cognition. Learners use media tools to influence their own lives. PCT suggests that learning is political as well as psychological and that dignity is a fundamental component of learning.

Introduction

Education and dignity should not be mutually exclusive phenomena. Dignity involves taking control over one's own life. As an educational process, participatory communication theory (PCT) holds as its cornerstone everyone's fundamental right to self-volition. PCT values the learner's knowledge and perspective. PCT allows the leaner to fully participate in educational decisions. PCT offers a rich educational framework within which instructional design issues can be addressed with and through dignity.

This paper will first define participatory communication and its theoretical constructs. Second, an explanation of how it works will be given. Third, several examples of participatory communication projects will be presented. Fourth, a rationale for employing PCT will be suggested, a rationale anchored in self-efficacy research as well as socio-constructivist approaches to learning theory. Finally, this paper will explore the uses and ramifications of participatory communication theory in an instructional design model. Education should be about liberation and humanness and dignity. Our teaching and instructional design processes should support such an approach.

What is Meant by Participatory Communication?

Participatory Communication is a field of communications theory that focuses on the political aspect of the communication process (Servaes, 1996) by combining critical analysis with an understanding of the structure of media. Much of the theory is involved with communities who struggle to become democratic entities; however, many attributes of participatory communications provide guidelines for all communities including established first world nations such as the United States.

Two working philosophies helped create and shape participatory communications: emancipatory pedagogy and communication structure. Paulo Freire's work in emancipatory pedagogy (Freire, 1978, 1995) provides a rich philosophical approach as to how education should be imagined. Education is not, as he calls it, based on the banking principle with a teacher depositing knowledge into a student account. Rather, education is the right of all people to have a voice, a voice not filtered through another. To a certain degree, equating voice with education establishes the precious link between communication and learning that is both different from and akin to many of the socio-constructivist theories of learning. Development of voice with respect for the voice of others is one of the key components within Freire's emancipatory pedagogy.

IR020159

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Another theoretical construct of participatory communication is the concept of dual communication channels within a society. On one hand there are official communication channels. These generally support the power structure and quite often are controlled by them (UNESCO, 1980). "Uniform, high-cost, highly professionalized, state-controlled media" (Servaes, 1996 p. 34) are found in most societies. A second channel is generally local, multi-viewpointed and lower cost, and blurs the actor/audience roles. Both communication channels are responsible for the dissemination, development and sustenance of cultural, social and political goals. But is has been suggested that the highly centralized communication channels dominate all communication (Cherryholmes, 1988).

Much of pedagogical critique has revolved around the conflict between these two communication channels, the hegemony of the dominant channel and the dependency of alternative viewpoints. Domination of the center by economic, cultural, and political elements results in control over minority ideas on the outskirts. Minority viewpoints become marginalized. The critical theorists of the 1950s (Marcuse, et al) decried the role of mass culture and its ability to drown out the voices of dissent. Mass culture was ubiquitous and omniscient. Mass culture was the tool of the ruling elite to legitimize its position; mass culture was the tool of the ruling elite to sustain and increase its power. However, during the 1980s critical studies began to look at popular culture (the name change establishes the paradigm shift) as a liberating communication channel because of its ironic elements (Giroux & McLaren, 1986). As a new medium replaces an older one, the content of the old medium becomes the new (McLuhan, 1964). Popular culture may still have been ubiquitous but through self-reference and irony, the difference between *what is* and *what is said* becomes the medium through which minority voices can be heard again.

Participatory Communications recognizes the power of the official communication channels to co-opt all viewpoints; but unlike critical theory and critical pedagogy which primarily contribute to a critique of society and culture, it provides a positive, action-oriented method in which minority viewpoints have a place in discourse and it recognizes minority modes of communication, minority media, as alternative yet valued voices. Minority viewpoints become both a frame of reference for official viewpoints and provide "texts" for discussion, discussions which have the potential to seed change.

How Does it Work?

Fundamental to the understanding of Participatory Communications is its deep, underlying belief in the fundamental dignity of men and women. Freire (1970, 1995) suggests that in order to be participatory all communication must follow a dialogic model. Individuals must seriously consider the perspectives and viewpoints of others (similar to Habermas' ideal speech situation). Freire also puts forth his concept of conscientizaçao and problem posing, whereby people learn "to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action" (Freire, 1970, p. 19). Finally, Freire's idea of praxis combines theory building and theory testing, action and reflection as a key component in the understanding and reading of the world (Wink, 1997).

Participatory communication creates a process which:

a) promotes community identification of needs and problems,
b) develops cogniscence of the skills and talents within the community allowing self-direction in acting in its best interests,
c) develops decision-making skills,
d) creates a climate in which a community can make decisions,
e) values and strengthens local knowledge systems,
f) develops group process skills which bring consensus through negotiation and conflict resolution,
g) creates a direct channel of communication between the community citizens and the decision-makers, and
h) molds a vision of the future through commitment and ownership by the community (Rajasunderam, 1998).

It is with the blend of emancipatory pedagogy and the study and employment of media that PCT finds its voice.

Examples of Participatory Communication

In Bangladesh grassroots women's organizations such as Banchte Shirkha and Proshika have used video projects to combat exploitation (Stuart and Bery, 1995). Interviewing politicians as they made promises and documenting their statements through video recordings provided the pressure needed to have leaders fulfill the promises heretofore broken. Video projects also raised awareness of women's rights issues and spousal abuse.

Popular theatre in India by such groups as the Association for the Rural Poor (ARP) used popular theatre as a single component of larger scale development (Thomas, 1995). In dealing with a fishing crisis between large mechanized trawling operations and smaller fishermen, ARP used local fisher folk as actors in their play. The play was stopped several times during its staging as the audience clarified the social reality as portrayed. The play became the catalyst for the people's political action against the mechanized trawling forces.

Folk songs, skits, and tape recorders, citizen-band radio, public-access television and copiers compete with state controlled large media for the hearts and minds of each country's citizens. A recent Boston Globe article (October 30, 1999) describes the use of electronic communication via e-mail and the Internet as a tool by the Falun Gong movement in the People's Republic of China. Small, participatory media struggles but is not subsumed by the larger, state-owned mass media.

Why Does it Work?.

The link between political empowerment and learning is the basis of participatory communications. Situated cognition and self-efficacy are not mere psychological buzzwords but become the mechanisms by which participatory communications theory functions.

A student's belief about his/her own abilities, or self-efficacy (Bandura 1997), influences students' motivation and goals for academic work. Freire has shown that an approach to learning that stimulates awareness of a student's social conscience and that promotes an awareness of possibilities for social transformation through action improves learning (Freire and Faundez, 1989).

Duguid and Brown (1992) suggest that learning takes place at the intersection of task and cognition. Realizing that teaching and learning are not one and the same thing (they quote Rabindrath Tagore about stealing knowledge from his teacher--after not being taught anything by his teacher), they provide a new context within which to think about how students learn. First and foremost, a student must be engaged within an authentic situation in order to learn. Problem posing and problem solving focus on what the situation is really like. It's as authentic as one can conceive.

Vygotsky suggests that students first learn through their relationship with others and only later internalize knowledge. In participatory communication research the rich relationship between participants and researcher becomes part of the research process (White, 1995). Jointly, researcher and participant, define the nature of their shared reality. Jointly, their knowledge base converges.

Implications for Instructional Design

In traditional ISD approaches three phases define curriculum development: 1) A front-end analysis defines the learner, the context, and the task. The task is then operationalized through a performance objective. 2) Material is developed to support the performance objective(s). 3) Assessment provides the feedback with which the materials are reevaluated and/or the front-end analysis is redefined.

To a certain extent the concept of an instructional systems design (ISD) model, any ISD model, might seem outside the frame of reference of participatory communication theory. Indeed, the very idea of knowledge transmission, objective (versus subjective) analysis, and a structural (context-free) design system is antithetical to the

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

participatory model. But PCT can offer a framework wherein education can be developed albeit with the twin caveats of *no dogma, no system* (Sullivan and Harper, 1996). It begins with Friere's *problem posing*.

A problem posing design model begins by asking the learner to define a) the problem, b) the context, and c) the learner and his/her strengths and potentials. A major difference between the traditional and the PCT model is that within the PCT model the learner identifies the problem. What is to be learned, the skills, the media used, and the curriculum are all products of the problem posing process which is defined by the participants, not by an external instructor. The role of the instructor is that of consultant providing only those resources that are requested. The instructor is a co-learner yet he/she must avoid at all times the inclination to dominate the learning process. And during the course of the process the instructor's role is reduced until he/she is no longer needed.

Historically, both in communication theory and in ISD models, the role of the expert overseer cultivated and inevitably developed the model of what was to be leaned. The teacher's perspective defined the process. The teacher knew best. The learner was marginalized, becoming the object of the process rather than the subject. Participatory Communications, however, values the learner's knowledge.

Tilakaratna (1991) provides a two-step process that moves between reflection and action and back again. Beginning with critical awareness of societal forces, a problem is defined. The group determines a strategy that will solve the problem. Self-assessment and action plans move the group towards the solution. Freire (1995) was adamant that a reflection on the action must take place that asked how the action addressed, solved, or changed the problem. This reflection on the action is important to renew the group's efforts, to revitalize the approach and to avoid the creation of a single viewpoint, the creation of a structure that co-opts the problem posing/problem solving process.

The instructor or ISD designer may better be thought of as an animator (Tilakaratna, 1989). The teacher's first role is to enable the students to become aware of the problem (animator). Secondly, the teacher is vital to group formation (facilitator). His/her responsibilities include group identification of the strengths and weaknesses of its members as well as the mobilization of resources within the confines of the problem. Finally, the teacher must leave the students to carry out their own learning. Tilakaratna calls this the *progressively redundant phase*, insuring that the students can continue to learn, to assess, define, and develop their skills.

Participatory Communications Theory also focuses on the media of communication, using the interplay between mass media and small media in both the problem posing and problem solving aspects of the learning model. Mass Media perpetuates and/or develops values and social structures of the power elite. Small Media develops new social structures and new values. The interaction of the media becomes the text to be read.

It is important that the Mass Media not be painted as being diabolical nor to either deify or belittle Small Media. Each is a cultural phenomenon. Mass Media is not omnipotent. While Small Media is not a substitute for Mass Media, it can fill information gaps that Mass Media cannot. And above all Small Media and Mass Media provide the questions, the problems, and the tools to read the world.

Conclusion

I have been concerned that educational intervention, teaching or curriculum development, has focused on the teacher rather than the learner. I have also been concerned with an almost patronizing attitude that comes with such a focus. Dignity involves taking control over one's own life. Ahmed Kathrada (1999) wrote that a life "without dignity is not worth living." By valuing the learner's knowledge and perspective, by allowing him or her to fully participate in educational decisions, and to employ minority media as both a text and a tool, participatory communication theory provides an educational framework for liberation, humanness and dignity.

References

Anderson, J.A. (1987). *Communication Research: Issues and Methods*. Mexico: McGrawHill.

Brown, J.S. and Duguid, P. (1992). "Stolen knowledge" in McLellan, H. (ed) *Situated Learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications.

Cherryholmes, C.H. (1988). *Power and Criticism: Poststructural investigations in education*. NY: Teachers College Press.

Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (translated from Portuguese by Myra Bergman Ramos). Herder and Herder: New York.

Freire, P. (1995) *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Robert R. Barr (Translator). Continuum Publishing Group.

Giroux, H & McLaren, P. (1986). "Teacher education and the politics for engagement: The case for Democratic schooling." *Harvard Educational Review*, 56.

Jervaes, J. (1996). "Introduction: Participatory Communication and research in Development Settings." In Servaes, J, Jacobson, T.L. and White, S.A. (eds*) Participatory Communication for Social Change*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Kathrada, A. (1999) *Letters from Robben Island*. East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press.

McLuhan, M. (1964) *Understanding Media: The extensions of man*. NY: McGaw-Hill..

Stuart, S & Bery, R. (1996). "Powerful grass-roots women communicators: Participatory video in Bangladesh." In Servaes, J, Jacobson, T.L. and White, S.A. (eds*) Participatory Communication for Social Change*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Thomas, P. N. (1996). "Popular theater in sickness and health: Observations from India." In Servaes, J, Jacobson, T.L. and White, S.A. (eds) *Participatory Communication for Social Change*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Tilakaratna, S. (1989). "Some aspects of local social development in Sri Lanka." *Regional Development Dialogue*, 10(2), 78-94.

Tilakaratna, S. (1991). "Stimulation of self-reliant initiatives by sensitized agents: Some lessons from practice." In Fals-Borda, O. and Rahman, .A. (eds*). Action and knowledge: Breaking the monopoly with participatory action-research*. New York: Apex Press.

UNESCO (1979). *Report on the intergovernmental conference on communication policies in Asia and Oceana.* Kuala Lumpur: UNESCO.

Wink, J. (1997) *Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World*. White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE